Kahanism: Rabbi Meir Kahane, Baruch Goldstein, Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir

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January 23, 2025

Kahanism, an extremist ideology rooted in the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, has evolved from a fringe movement into a significant force shaping Israeli politics and society. Originally advocating for Jewish supremacy, the expulsion of Arabs, and a theocratic state governed by Jewish law, Kahanism was formally marginalized after the banning of Kahane's Kach party in 1988. However, its influence persisted through figures such as Baruch Goldstein, whose 1994 Hebron massacre underscored the violent potential of Kahanist ideology. In recent years, politicians like Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir have brought elements of Kahanist thought into the mainstream by promoting policies that prioritize Jewish national identity, settlement expansion, and tough security measures. This paper examines the ideological foundations of Kahanism, its key figures, and the impact of their policies on Israeli society, Palestinian relations, and international diplomacy. By tracing the trajectory of Kahanist ideology, we seek to understand its enduring presence and the challenges it poses to Israel's democratic framework and regional stability.

Keywords: Kahanism, Meir Kahane, Baruch Goldstein, Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir, Jewish supremacy, Israeli politics, Arab expulsion, religious nationalism, far-right, settler movement, extremism, Hebron massacre, democracy in Israel. 47 pages.

I. Introduction

Background and Context

Kahanism is an extremist nationalist ideology rooted in the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who advocated for a theocratic Jewish state, the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories, and strict adherence to Jewish religious law. Kahane's ideology emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States with the formation of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), an organization aimed at defending Jewish communities through militant means. Later, Kahane immigrated to Israel, where he founded the far-right political party Kach, which sought to institutionalize his vision of an ethnically homogeneous Jewish state.

The ideology of Kahanism is characterized by a rejection of secular democracy, a belief in Jewish supremacy, and an uncompromising stance on territorial expansion. It posits that the survival of the Jewish people depends on the elimination of any Arab presence within Israel's borders, viewing Arabs as an existential threat. This belief is grounded in a selective interpretation of biblical texts and Jewish historical experiences, particularly the trauma of the Holocaust and conflicts with neighboring Arab states.

Despite the banning of the Kach party in the late 1980s for inciting racial hatred and its classification as a terrorist organization by Israel and several Western countries, Kahanism's influence did not disappear. Instead, it persisted within radical settler movements and among certain nationalist and religious Zionist groups. Over time, aspects of Kahanist thought have resurfaced in mainstream Israeli politics, particularly through figures who, while not explicitly identifying as Kahanists, have adopted hardline positions on issues such as settlements, security, and the status of Arab citizens in Israel.

Definition of Kahanism and Its Ideological Roots

Kahanism can be defined as an ultra-nationalist, religiously motivated political ideology that calls for the exclusive Jewish control of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, achieved through the forced removal of non-Jews. Its core tenets include:

1. **Jewish Supremacy:** The belief that Jews are divinely entitled to the land of Israel and must maintain absolute control over it.

2. **Ethnic Expulsion:** Advocacy for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel, viewing their presence as a demographic and ideological threat.
3. **Theocratic Governance:** Replacing Israel's democratic system with a government based on Halacha (Jewish law).
4. **Militant Action:** Encouragement of vigilantism and preemptive violence to deter perceived threats to Jewish sovereignty.
5. **Anti-Assimilationism:** Strong opposition to intermarriage and cultural assimilation with non-Jews.

Kahanism's ideological roots lie in the historical experiences of Jewish persecution, the biblical concept of Jewish chosenness, and modern Zionist nationalist movements. However, its extremist interpretation of these ideas sets it apart from mainstream Zionism, which—despite its commitment to Jewish self-determination—generally embraces democratic governance and coexistence with non-Jews within Israel.

Overview of Its Impact on Israeli Politics and Society

While Kahanism was initially considered an extremist fringe movement, its long-term impact on Israeli politics and society has been profound. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a Kahanist-inspired extremist underscored the movement's ability to influence individuals to commit acts of violence in the name of Jewish nationalism. The Hebron massacre carried out by Baruch Goldstein in 1994 further cemented Kahanism's reputation as a dangerous ideology, leading to its official ban in Israel.

Despite these condemnations, Kahanist rhetoric has found a foothold within certain segments of Israeli society, particularly among nationalist settlers in the West Bank, who support policies aimed at expanding Jewish settlements and restricting Palestinian movement. Political figures such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, who have entered Israel's mainstream political arena, espouse positions that closely align with Kahanist ideas, advocating for Jewish dominance and opposing Palestinian self-determination.

The influence of Kahanism can also be seen in the legislative sphere, with increased efforts to pass laws that prioritize Jewish identity over democratic

principles, such as the controversial 2018 Nation-State Law, which declared Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, effectively relegating non-Jewish citizens to second-class status. Additionally, the rise of ultra-nationalist political parties and their inclusion in governing coalitions have pushed Israeli policies further to the right, with a greater emphasis on security, settlement expansion, and the erosion of Arab political rights.

Purpose of the Paper

This paper aims to explore the evolution of Kahanism from its radical origins to its current influence within Israeli politics. By examining key figures such as Rabbi Meir Kahane, Baruch Goldstein, Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir, the paper will assess how Kahanist ideology has transitioned from the margins to the mainstream. It will also investigate the socio-political factors that have enabled this shift and the potential consequences for Israel's future as both a Jewish and democratic state.

In particular, the paper will analyze:

1. How Meir Kahane's ideas laid the groundwork for contemporary nationalist policies.
2. The role of Baruch Goldstein in cementing Kahanism's infamy.
3. Netanyahu's strategic alliances and policy shifts that have given space for far-right ideologies to flourish.
4. Smotrich and Ben-Gvir's rise to power and their policy agendas.
5. The broader impact of Kahanist-inspired policies on Israeli society and Palestinian relations.

Thesis Statement

While Kahanism originated as a fringe movement under Rabbi Meir Kahane, its ideas have permeated mainstream politics through figures such as Netanyahu, Smotrich, and Ben-Gvir. The once-radical concepts of Jewish supremacy, Arab displacement, and theocratic governance have gradually been repackaged and normalized within Israel’s political landscape. This paper argues that the integration of Kahanist principles into mainstream politics poses significant

challenges to Israel's democratic values, its relationship with the international community, and the prospects for peace with Palestinians.

II. Rabbi Meir Kahane: The Origins of Kahanism

Life and Influences

Early Years and Influences in the U.S. and Israel

Rabbi Meir Kahane was born in 1932 in Brooklyn, New York, to an Orthodox Jewish family of Eastern European descent. His early exposure to Jewish religious teachings, coupled with the backdrop of World War II and the Holocaust, shaped his strong sense of Jewish identity and survivalism. Kahane's father was a committed Zionist and a member of the Revisionist Zionist movement, which was influenced by Ze'ev Jabotinsky's nationalist ideology advocating for Jewish self-defense and territorial expansion.

In the 1950s, Kahane studied at Yeshiva University, earning rabbinic ordination, and later obtained a law degree from New York University. His intellectual foundation was deeply rooted in religious Zionism and the belief that Jewish destiny was tied to the land of Israel. The persecution of Jews, both historically and in contemporary antisemitic incidents in the U.S. and abroad, further cemented his belief that Jews must take proactive, and often militant, measures to secure their existence.

Kahane's early career saw him writing for Jewish and right-wing publications, advocating for a strong Jewish response to threats of assimilation and antisemitism. His time in the U.S. also saw him become involved with the FBI as an informant, a period that fueled his strategic thinking and introduced him to covert operations.

Upon his immigration to Israel in 1971, Kahane sought to apply his ideas within the Israeli political and social context, where tensions between Jews and Arabs were escalating in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Seeing the presence of Arabs in the land of Israel as an existential threat, he set out to influence Israeli policies and public opinion through activism and political engagement.

Founding of the Jewish Defense League (JDL) and Kach Party

In 1968, Kahane founded the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in New York, aiming to protect Jewish communities from antisemitic threats. The JDL's motto, "Never Again," reflected a militant stance against perceived enemies of the Jewish people. The organization used controversial methods, including vigilante actions, violent confrontations, and threats against those it considered threats to Jewish security, such as neo-Nazi groups and Soviet agents. The JDL also targeted individuals and institutions that they accused of being complicit in Jewish persecution, including politicians and journalists.

The JDL's tactics, including bombings and aggressive demonstrations, brought Kahane into conflict with U.S. law enforcement and Jewish organizations, which saw his actions as counterproductive and damaging to the broader Jewish community. Nevertheless, Kahane attracted a devoted following among young Jewish militants and those who felt alienated by mainstream Jewish institutions.

After moving to Israel, Kahane established the Kach party in 1971, seeking to implement his vision of an ethnically pure Jewish state. The party's platform was explicitly based on the principles of Jewish supremacy and called for the expulsion of all Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories. Kahane argued that coexistence with Arabs was impossible and that Jewish sovereignty required complete demographic control.

Kach attracted a small but dedicated following among disillusioned Israelis, particularly within the settler movement and those frustrated with Israel’s security policies. However, it faced widespread opposition from the Israeli political establishment, which viewed Kahane’s rhetoric as extreme and divisive.

Core Beliefs and Teachings

Jewish Supremacy and the Expulsion of Arabs

One of Kahane’s central ideological tenets was the belief in Jewish supremacy, which held that the Jewish people were divinely chosen and entitled to exclusive sovereignty over the land of Israel. He argued that Arabs living in Israel were an

internal threat that needed to be eliminated through forced expulsion or emigration.

Kahane frequently cited biblical texts to support his arguments, framing the conflict between Jews and Arabs as an existential and religious struggle. He claimed that allowing Arabs to remain in Israel would inevitably lead to the destruction of the Jewish state, both demographically and culturally. His proposed solution was mass expulsion, which he viewed as a necessary step to fulfill the biblical promise of a Greater Israel.

His rhetoric often incited violence and contributed to tensions between Jewish and Arab communities. Kahane's speeches and writings, such as his book *They Must Go,* explicitly called for the removal of Arabs and warned of dire consequences if his warnings were not heeded.

Halachic Governance and Opposition to Secular Democracy

Kahane was a staunch opponent of Israel's secular democratic system, arguing that it was incompatible with Jewish survival and destiny. He advocated for the implementation of Halacha (Jewish religious law) as the basis for governance, asserting that only a theocratic state could ensure the true fulfillment of Jewish national aspirations.

According to Kahane, secular institutions diluted Jewish identity and undermined the unity of the Jewish people. He opposed any form of secularism, including democratic pluralism and liberal values that allowed non-Jews to have equal rights within the Jewish state.

Kahane's vision for Israel included strict religious laws, gender segregation, and the elimination of cultural influences that he viewed as corrupting. He also called for the removal of secular leaders and institutions, which he saw as obstacles to fulfilling the biblical vision of a theocratic Jewish kingdom.

Political Impact and Legacy

Election to the Knesset and Subsequent Ban of Kach Party

Despite widespread opposition from the Israeli political establishment, Kahane successfully gained a seat in the Israeli Knesset (parliament) in 1984, representing the Kach party. His entry into mainstream politics was a shock to many Israelis, as he used the parliamentary platform to advocate for his extremist views, openly calling for the expulsion of Arabs and the establishment of Jewish-only areas.

During his time in the Knesset, Kahane proposed a series of controversial laws, including those aimed at revoking the citizenship of Arab citizens, restricting their access to employment, and enforcing racial segregation. His speeches were inflammatory and frequently resulted in walkouts by other lawmakers.

In 1988, Kach was banned from participating in Israeli elections under the country's anti-racism laws, which deemed its platform incitement to racial hatred. The Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Kach's ideology was fundamentally undemocratic and posed a threat to the nation's stability.

Influence on Radical Settler Movements and Far-Right Ideologies

Although Kach was banned and Kahane was ostracized by the political mainstream, his ideas continued to resonate within radical settler movements and far-right circles. His assassination in 1990 by an Egyptian-American gunman in New York City turned him into a martyr for extremists, further solidifying his influence.

Kahane's followers continued to promote his ideology, leading to the rise of offshoot groups such as Kahane Chai, which carried out violent acts, including the 1994 Hebron massacre by Baruch Goldstein, a devoted follower of Kahane. Goldstein's actions were widely condemned, but among Kahanist supporters, he was hailed as a hero.

Today, Kahane's influence can be seen in the rhetoric and policies of far-right Israeli politicians such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, who have embraced aspects of his ideology while attempting to distance themselves from his openly racist language. The normalization of Kahanist rhetoric within Israeli

politics demonstrates the enduring impact of Kahane's ideas, despite efforts to marginalize them.

In conclusion, Rabbi Meir Kahane's legacy remains controversial and polarizing. While his movement was officially banned, his ideology continues to shape elements of Israeli society and politics, raising questions about the balance between democracy and nationalism in Israel's future.

III. Baruch Goldstein: From Ideology to Violence

Personal Background and Radicalization

Baruch Goldstein was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1956 to a Jewish family with strong religious and Zionist values. Raised in the Orthodox Jewish community, he was deeply influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose ideas of Jewish supremacy and the urgent need for self-defense against perceived enemies resonated with him from an early age. Goldstein attended Yeshiva University and later pursued a medical degree at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, specializing in emergency medicine.

Despite his promising medical career in the United States, Goldstein was drawn to Israel's nationalist cause, believing that his destiny lay in defending the Jewish homeland. In the 1980s, he immigrated to Israel and settled in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba, an area known for its concentration of religious nationalist settlers and its proximity to the historically and religiously significant city of Hebron. Hebron, a flashpoint of Israeli-Palestinian tensions, contains the Tomb of the Patriarchs, a site sacred to both Jews and Muslims.

Goldstein quickly became involved in extremist settler movements, integrating himself into the radical fringes of the Kach movement, which had been banned from Israeli politics by that time due to its racist and anti-Arab agenda. As a staunch disciple of Meir Kahane, Goldstein believed that the survival of the Jewish people required the complete removal of Arabs from the biblical Land of Israel. He viewed Arabs not only as a demographic threat but as a physical enemy,

echoing Kahane’s rhetoric that Jewish security could only be assured through forceful action.

During his time in Kiryat Arba, Goldstein served as a physician, often treating victims of Palestinian attacks, which further solidified his belief that Arabs were an existential threat. His experiences and exposure to ongoing violence in the region deepened his radicalization and fueled his conviction that preemptive action was necessary to protect the Jewish people. Goldstein's extremist views and close ties to Kahanist networks placed him at the heart of an increasingly militant settler movement advocating for aggressive policies against Palestinians.

The Hebron Massacre (1994)

Description of the Attack and Its Consequences

On the morning of February 25, 1994, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, Goldstein entered the Cave of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, armed with an IMI Galil assault rifle and extra magazines. As hundreds of Palestinian worshippers gathered for morning prayers, Goldstein opened fire indiscriminately, killing 29 worshippers and injuring over 125 others before being overpowered and beaten to death by the survivors.

The attack occurred in a highly sensitive and contested religious site, which is divided between Jewish and Muslim areas. The massacre sparked immediate chaos and outrage, with violence erupting in Hebron and other parts of the West Bank in the days that followed. The Israeli military responded by imposing curfews and restrictions on Palestinian movement, effectively locking down the city to prevent further escalation.

In the wake of the massacre, tensions flared across Israel and the occupied territories, leading to mass protests, clashes with Israeli security forces, and a wave of retaliatory attacks by Palestinian militant groups, including Hamas, which carried out suicide bombings in response. The massacre significantly strained relations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, further derailing peace negotiations under the Oslo Accords.

Reactions from Israeli Society and the International Community

The massacre was universally condemned by Israeli leaders, with then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin denouncing Goldstein's actions as a heinous crime that went against the values of the state. The Israeli government took immediate action, banning the Kach movement and its offshoot, Kahane Chai, as terrorist organizations under Israeli law. Additionally, tighter security measures were implemented in Hebron, including increased military presence to prevent further outbreaks of violence.

Within Israeli society, reactions were mixed. The mainstream public and political establishment largely rejected Goldstein's act of terrorism, viewing it as a stain on Israel's moral standing and a dangerous escalation of the conflict. However, segments of the far-right settler community, particularly in Kiryat Arba and other extremist strongholds, viewed Goldstein as a hero who had acted out of necessity to defend the Jewish people.

Internationally, the massacre drew widespread condemnation, with the United Nations Security Council passing Resolution 904, which called for the protection of Palestinian civilians and the deployment of international observers in Hebron. The attack further damaged Israel's image on the global stage and fueled criticism of its settlement policies and occupation of Palestinian territories.

The massacre also had a profound effect on the Palestinian leadership, with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) suspending peace talks temporarily and demanding greater security guarantees from Israel. The event solidified Palestinian perceptions of Israeli settlers as a militant and expansionist force, exacerbating distrust and hostility in the ongoing conflict.

Legacy and Influence

Goldstein as a Martyr for Extremists vs. Condemnation by the State

Despite the broad condemnation of Goldstein's actions by the Israeli government and much of society, he became a martyr and a symbol of resistance for elements of the radical settler movement and Kahanist followers. His grave in Kiryat Arba quickly became a pilgrimage site for extremists who saw him as a righteous

defender of Jewish sovereignty. Supporters erected a shrine at his gravesite, inscribed with the words: *"He gave his life for the people of Israel, its Torah, and land."*

The Israeli government eventually ordered the demolition of the shrine, recognizing the danger of allowing Goldstein's memory to be glorified. However, his legacy continued to inspire extremists within the settler movement and beyond. Posters and graffiti celebrating Goldstein's actions occasionally appeared in radical Jewish communities, and some settlers continued to hold annual commemorations in his honor.

The debate over Goldstein's actions remains a divisive issue within Israeli society. While most Israelis reject his ideology and methods, his radical supporters persist in claiming that his actions were justified and necessary, reflecting the enduring challenge of combating extremism within Israeli politics and society.

The Continued Inspiration for Far-Right Elements in Israel

Goldstein's legacy continues to influence far-right elements in Israel, including political figures such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, who have expressed admiration for aspects of Kahanist ideology, albeit in a less overt manner. Ben-Gvir, for example, once displayed a portrait of Goldstein in his home and has been accused of using inflammatory rhetoric against Arabs that echoes Kahane's teachings.

Kahanist-inspired individuals and groups remain active within Israeli politics, pushing for policies that reflect Goldstein's ideology, such as the annexation of the West Bank, the restriction of Arab civil rights, and the expansion of Jewish settlements. The influence of these groups is particularly noticeable during times of heightened security tensions when calls for harsher measures against Palestinians gain traction.

Moreover, Goldstein's actions have been used by Palestinian militant groups to justify their own attacks against Israeli civilians, perpetuating a cycle of violence and retribution that continues to plague the region.

Conclusion

Baruch Goldstein’s act of terror in Hebron remains a defining moment in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, serving as both a cautionary tale and a source of inspiration for extremists. His radicalization within the Kahanist movement underscores the dangerous intersection of religious nationalism and political violence. While his ideology has been officially repudiated by the Israeli state, its echoes persist in the rhetoric and policies of far-right political figures, highlighting the ongoing struggle within Israel to balance democracy, security, and nationalism.

IV. Mainstreaming Kahanism: The Political Trajectory of Benjamin Netanyahu

Netanyahu's Political Strategy

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, has been a master strategist in navigating the complex political landscape of Israel. While he does not openly align himself with Kahanist ideology, his political trajectory has seen a gradual mainstreaming of far-right elements, including policies and rhetoric that echo aspects of Rabbi Meir Kahane's vision.

Netanyahu has skillfully balanced nationalist rhetoric with diplomatic pragmatism, positioning himself as both a staunch defender of Israeli security and a global statesman. On one hand, he has capitalized on nationalist sentiments to rally his right-wing base, emphasizing the threats posed by Iran, Palestinian terrorism, and international criticism of Israel. On the other hand, he has pursued diplomatic achievements, such as the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations with several Arab states, presenting himself as a pragmatic leader capable of balancing hardline policies with strategic alliances.

Balancing Nationalist Rhetoric with Diplomatic Pragmatism

Netanyahu has repeatedly employed nationalist rhetoric to appeal to his core voter base, particularly among religious Zionists and settlers. He has framed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in existential terms, often portraying Palestinian leadership as inherently hostile and unwilling to recognize Israel's right to exist. He has also positioned himself as the only leader capable of ensuring Israel's

security, a stance that has helped him maintain broad support among right-leaning voters.

At the same time, Netanyahu has been pragmatic in his international dealings, seeking to maintain strong ties with the United States and other Western allies. His speeches at the United Nations and other global platforms have emphasized Israel's democratic values, often downplaying controversial domestic policies that could be perceived as aligning with far-right extremism.

Alliances with Far-Right Figures and Policies on Settlements

Despite his diplomatic pragmatism, Netanyahu has increasingly aligned himself with far-right figures such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose views are rooted in Kahanist ideology. In his pursuit of political survival and coalition stability, Netanyahu has embraced these figures, granting them key positions in his government and lending legitimacy to their hardline policies.

His policies on Jewish settlements in the West Bank have also mirrored Kahanist goals, with consistent support for settlement expansion, legalization of unauthorized outposts, and the creation of infrastructure that solidifies Israeli control over disputed territories. Under his leadership, the settler population in the West Bank has grown significantly, with government funding and legal support ensuring their continued expansion despite international condemnation.

Netanyahu's alliances with far-right politicians have led to policies that seek to alter the demographic and political landscape of the region, further marginalizing Palestinian claims to statehood and reinforcing Jewish dominance over the contested territories.

Policies Aligned with Kahanist Ideals

While Netanyahu stops short of openly endorsing Kahanist principles, his policies often reflect elements of Kahane's vision, particularly in terms of settlement expansion and the marginalization of Arab citizens. These policies, while framed as necessary security measures, have contributed to the gradual erosion of the possibility of a two-state solution and the entrenchment of a de facto one-state reality with unequal rights for Palestinians.

Expansion of Settlements and Undermining the Two-State Solution

Under Netanyahu's leadership, Israel has dramatically expanded settlements in the West Bank, a policy that aligns with Kahanist ideals of Jewish exclusivity in the biblical Land of Israel. Despite international opposition and repeated warnings from the U.S. and the European Union, Netanyahu's government has:

- Legalized numerous settlement outposts previously considered illegal under Israeli law.
- Promoted infrastructure projects that integrate the West Bank into Israel's transportation and economic systems.
- Blocked or delayed negotiations aimed at implementing a two-state solution, citing security concerns and Palestinian intransigence.

The expansion of settlements serves a dual purpose: fulfilling ideological goals of Jewish sovereignty and ensuring that the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state becomes increasingly untenable. This aligns with Kahane's core belief that Arabs must not have political control or territorial claims in the land of Israel.

Anti-Arab Rhetoric and Legislative Moves Toward Ethnic Nationalism

Netanyahu's political rhetoric has frequently included statements that portray Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians as a demographic and security threat. During election campaigns, he has used fear-based messaging, warning of high Arab voter turnout and framing his leadership as essential to maintaining Jewish dominance.

Legislatively, Netanyahu's government has introduced and supported laws that critics argue promote ethnic nationalism, such as the controversial Nation-State Law (2018), which:

- Declares Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.
- Downplays the status of Arabic as an official language.
- Emphasizes Jewish settlement as a national value.

This law aligns with Kahanist ideals by legally codifying the preferential status of Jews in Israel and marginalizing the rights of Arab citizens, reinforcing their second-class status within the state.

Distancing vs. Enabling Extremism

Throughout his career, Netanyahu has walked a fine line between publicly condemning extremist violence and politically empowering far-right elements that advocate for policies reminiscent of Kahanism.

Netanyahu's Condemnation of Violence vs. Political Empowerment of Extremists

Following violent incidents such as the Hebron massacre (1994) by Baruch Goldstein and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a far-right extremist, Netanyahu has publicly condemned such acts. He has maintained that Israel is a democratic state that values the rule of law and rejects vigilantism.

However, Netanyahu's actions often contradict his words. By forging political alliances with individuals who openly admire Kahane or espouse similar views, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir, Netanyahu has provided a platform for extremist ideology to gain legitimacy. This has allowed radical rhetoric to seep into mainstream discourse and normalize previously unacceptable positions.

Netanyahu has also been accused of tacitly encouraging far-right sentiment through his policies, such as allowing settler violence against Palestinians to go largely unchecked and promoting narratives that reinforce Jewish-Arab tensions.

The Impact of His Leadership on the Normalization of Far-Right Views

Netanyahu's tenure has witnessed a gradual normalization of far-right rhetoric and policies that were once considered fringe. By strategically incorporating Kahanist-aligned figures into his coalitions, he has helped shift the Overton window of Israeli politics further to the right.

The consequences of this shift include:

1. **Increased Legitimacy for Far-Right Policies:**
   Policies once deemed extremist, such as annexation of the West Bank and the rejection of Palestinian statehood, are now mainstream discussion points.

2. **Marginalization of Liberal and Arab Voices:**
   Netanyahu's governments have worked to weaken left-leaning parties and Arab political representation, framing them as threats to national security.
3. **Growing Division Within Israeli Society:**
   The rise of far-right policies has deepened societal divisions, with more Israeli citizens becoming polarized on issues of identity, security, and democracy.
4. **International Backlash:**
   While Netanyahu has maintained good relations with conservative global leaders, the increasing influence of far-right ideologies in his government has drawn criticism from the international community, straining diplomatic ties.

Conclusion

Benjamin Netanyahu's political strategy has played a critical role in mainstreaming elements of Kahanism within Israeli politics. While he has publicly distanced himself from overt extremism, his alliances with far-right figures and policies aligned with their agenda have effectively brought Kahanist-inspired ideas into the mainstream. Netanyahu's legacy will likely be debated in terms of his contributions to Israel's security and economic growth, but his role in empowering nationalist and anti-Arab policies cannot be ignored.

As Israel continues to grapple with questions of democracy, identity, and security, Netanyahu's influence in shaping these debates remains undeniable, with far-reaching implications for the country's future and its relationships with the world.

V. Bezalel Smotrich: The Ideological Heir to Kahane

Political Career and Ideological Foundations

Bezalel Smotrich has emerged as one of the most influential figures in Israel's far-right political landscape, often seen as a key torchbearer of the ideological legacy of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Smotrich's political career is deeply rooted in Religious

Zionism, a movement that combines Orthodox Jewish beliefs with nationalist political aspirations. He envisions Israel as a Jewish state governed by Halacha (Jewish law) and has advocated for policies that prioritize Jewish sovereignty over democratic pluralism.

Religious Zionism and the Push for Jewish Sovereignty

Smotrich's ideological foundation lies in the belief that the Jewish people have an inherent and divinely ordained right to the entire biblical Land of Israel, encompassing present-day Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem. He views the presence of Arabs in these territories as a fundamental threat to the Jewish character of the state and believes that the solution lies in asserting Jewish sovereignty through demographic and legal means.

Raised in a nationalist-religious environment, Smotrich was deeply influenced by the settler movement and its struggle to expand Jewish presence in the West Bank. His political career began within activist circles, participating in protests against Israeli government policies perceived as conciliatory towards Palestinians, such as the disengagement from Gaza in 2005. His activism propelled him into political prominence, eventually leading to his election to the Knesset in 2015 as part of the Jewish Home party, a religious-nationalist faction.

In 2021, Smotrich founded the Religious Zionist Party, consolidating his position as a leading advocate for expanding Jewish settlements, opposing Palestinian statehood, and implementing policies that align with Kahane's radical vision. Smotrich's ascent within Israeli politics has been marked by his unapologetic support for Jewish supremacy and his efforts to shape government policies that reflect this ideology.

Policies and Controversies

Bezalel Smotrich’s political career has been defined by his outspoken and often incendiary remarks regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, civil rights, and Israel's legal framework. His positions on key issues have consistently aligned with extremist nationalist goals, leading to significant controversy both domestically and internationally.

Calls for Annexation of the West Bank

Smotrich is one of the most vocal proponents of annexing the entire West Bank, a policy that would permanently cement Israeli control over the region and nullify any possibility of a two-state solution. He argues that the annexation is a biblical, historical, and security necessity, frequently dismissing Palestinian national aspirations as illegitimate.

- He has advocated for extending Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank in stages, gradually integrating Jewish settlements into Israel's legal and administrative frameworks while offering Palestinians limited or conditional rights.
- Smotrich has openly opposed any land concessions to Palestinians, arguing that such moves would weaken Jewish claims and embolden enemies of Israel.
- In 2023, as a member of Netanyahu's coalition government, Smotrich was given control over aspects of West Bank governance, further empowering him to push settlement expansion and policies aimed at increasing Jewish control over the territory.

Statements Regarding Arab Expulsion and Discrimination Policies

Smotrich has made numerous statements that echo Kahanist ideas regarding the expulsion of Arabs and policies aimed at marginalizing them within Israeli society. Some of his most controversial remarks include:

- He has suggested that Palestinian citizens of Israel who do not accept Jewish rule should leave the country or expect second-class status.
- In 2017, he proposed the "Decisive Plan," which outlined three choices for Palestinians: surrender and accept Jewish rule, voluntary emigration, or armed confrontation with inevitable defeat.
- Smotrich has repeatedly referred to Arab citizens of Israel as a "fifth column" and questioned their loyalty to the state.

- He has advocated for policies that discriminate against non-Jews, such as restricting Arab access to certain public services and tightening land ownership laws to prevent Arabs from purchasing land in Jewish areas.

Smotrich's comments have sparked significant outrage among Arab citizens of Israel, human rights groups, and international observers, who see his policies as advocating for ethnic cleansing and institutionalized discrimination.

Connection to Kahanism

Although Bezalel Smotrich does not explicitly identify as a Kahanist, his rhetoric and policies bear striking similarities to the ideology of Meir Kahane. The overlap is evident in their shared emphasis on Jewish supremacy, their rejection of coexistence with Arabs, and their vision of an exclusively Jewish state.

Smotrich's Rhetoric and Policies Echoing Kahane's Vision

Smotrich's political statements and legislative proposals closely reflect Kahane's ideology in the following ways:

1. **Jewish Sovereignty Over All of Israel:**
    - Smotrich's call for the complete annexation of the West Bank and his rejection of Palestinian national rights align with Kahane's belief that Arabs should have no political presence in the Jewish state.
2. **Arab Expulsion and Disenfranchisement:**
    - Smotrich has proposed policies to limit Arab political participation and national influence, reminiscent of Kahane's platform of expulsion and segregation.
3. **Religious Governance:**
    - He supports implementing Jewish religious law into Israel's legal system, a central tenet of Kahanist thought that rejects secular democracy in favor of theocratic rule.

4. **Vigilante and Settler Support:**
    - Smotrich has shown support for radical settler movements, which often engage in violent acts against Palestinians, echoing the tactics of Kahanist militias that sought to "cleanse" Israel of non-Jews.

Public Perception and International Response

Smotrich's rise to prominence has triggered alarm and condemnation both within Israel and abroad. While he enjoys strong support among religious nationalist voters and settlers, his views have alienated large segments of Israeli society and drawn harsh criticism from international bodies.

Domestic Perception:

- Critics within Israel, including left-leaning politicians and civil society organizations, view Smotrich as a dangerous extremist whose policies threaten Israel's democratic foundations and international standing.
- Arab citizens of Israel consider his rhetoric inflammatory and inciteful, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and division.
- Even some within the right-wing political spectrum have expressed concern that his hardline views could destabilize Israel's relationships with key allies and escalate regional tensions.

International Response:

- The United States, European Union, and human rights organizations have condemned Smotrich’s statements and policies, warning that they undermine prospects for peace and violate fundamental human rights.
- In 2023, during a visit to France, Smotrich's presence sparked protests and calls for sanctions due to his inflammatory comments regarding Palestinian identity.
- Several U.S. lawmakers have pushed for restrictions on American aid to Israel if Smotrich and other far-right figures continue to hold key government positions.

Despite these pressures, Smotrich continues to wield significant influence within the Israeli government, largely due to his strategic alliances with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who relies on far-right factions to maintain political power.

Conclusion

Bezalel Smotrich represents the ideological continuation of Meir Kahane's vision, albeit within a more politically strategic framework. His policies and rhetoric closely align with Kahanist principles, advocating for Jewish supremacy, the annexation of Palestinian territories, and the marginalization of Arab citizens. While his views have been widely condemned internationally, they continue to gain traction within certain segments of Israeli society, reflecting the growing influence of far-right nationalism in the country's political landscape.

As Smotrich continues to shape Israeli policy from within the government, his influence raises critical questions about the balance between democracy and religious nationalism, and the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

VI. Itamar Ben-Gvir: From Radicalism to Political Power

Background and Ideological Roots

Itamar Ben-Gvir, one of Israel's most controversial political figures, has long been associated with the far-right, ultra-nationalist ideology rooted in Kahanism. Born in 1976 in Jerusalem, Ben-Gvir was raised in a religious-nationalist environment and became involved in radical activism from a young age. His worldview was heavily influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, whose Kach party advocated for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel and the occupied territories, the implementation of Jewish religious law, and the establishment of a Jewish theocracy.

During his teenage years in the 1990s, Ben-Gvir was active in Kahanist circles, participating in protests and demonstrations that opposed any compromise with Palestinians. He gained national attention in 1995, just weeks before the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, when he appeared on television holding a car emblem that had been stolen from Rabin's vehicle. Ben-

Gvir infamously declared, *"We got to his car, and we'll get to him too."* This incident cemented his reputation as an extremist willing to confront Israeli authorities and politicians.

Ben-Gvir studied law and became a defense attorney, specializing in representing far-right settlers and individuals accused of incitement and hate crimes. His legal career allowed him to gain deeper insights into the judicial and political systems, which he later used to advance his own political ambitions. Over time, he transitioned from a radical activist into a savvy political operator, leveraging his Kahanist roots while rebranding himself as a champion of Jewish security and sovereignty.

Political Rise and Influence

Leader of Otzma Yehudit and Entry into Government

Ben-Gvir's political career took off when he became the leader of Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power), a party that openly embraces the ideological legacy of Meir Kahane. Otzma Yehudit advocates for Jewish supremacy, the annexation of the West Bank, the expulsion of “disloyal” Arabs, and the application of Jewish religious law. Despite being barred from running for office several times in the past due to his extremist views, Ben-Gvir capitalized on Israel's shifting political landscape and the growing influence of the far-right.

His rise to power was facilitated by his alliance with other right-wing parties, including Bezalel Smotrich's Religious Zionism Party, and his ability to appeal to a broader audience by focusing on security concerns and nationalist sentiments. In the 2021 and 2022 elections, Ben-Gvir's party gained significant traction, culminating in his appointment as Minister of National Security under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government.

Ben-Gvir's entry into government marked a dramatic shift in Israeli politics, bringing a figure with openly Kahanist sympathies into the mainstream political establishment. His position as National Security Minister granted him control over the Israeli police and internal security policies, allowing him to push for aggressive measures against Palestinians, leftist activists, and dissenters within Israel.

Policy Positions and Confrontations with Israeli Institutions

Ben-Gvir has consistently pushed for policies that align with his ultra-nationalist and security-focused agenda. His key policy positions include:

1. **Expansion of Settlements and Annexation:**
    - He has called for the annexation of the entire West Bank and the expansion of Jewish settlements to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.
    - He opposes any negotiations with Palestinians and advocates for full Israeli sovereignty over the territories.
2. **Tougher Measures Against Palestinians:**
    - As National Security Minister, he has introduced policies to increase the use of force against Palestinian protesters and militants, arguing that Israeli security forces must act with a "free hand."
    - He has pushed for harsher punishments for Palestinians convicted of terrorism and has sought to ease the rules of engagement for Israeli soldiers.
3. **Jewish Prayer Rights on the Temple Mount:**
    - Ben-Gvir has been a vocal advocate for allowing Jewish prayer at the Temple Mount, a highly contentious issue that has historically been a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian tensions.
    - His visits to the site as a government minister have drawn widespread condemnation and accusations of incitement.
4. **Crackdown on Arab Communities:**
    - He has called for increased police presence in Arab-majority cities within Israel and policies aimed at reducing crime, though critics argue that his measures are rooted in discriminatory motives.
    - His rhetoric has frequently painted Arab citizens of Israel as a security threat, leading to concerns of racial profiling and systemic discrimination.

Ben-Gvir's policies have brought him into frequent clashes with Israel's legal institutions, the security establishment, and moderate political figures. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), in particular, have resisted some of his directives, warning that his hardline stance could escalate tensions and undermine regional stability.

Public Image and Criticism

His Evolving Rhetoric to Appeal to Mainstream Voters

In recent years, Ben-Gvir has made efforts to soften his public image in order to appeal to a broader audience. While he continues to espouse hardline policies, he has strategically adjusted his rhetoric to focus on themes of law and order, national pride, and personal security, which resonate with many Israelis facing concerns about terrorism and crime.

His public appearances have emphasized his role as a defender of ordinary Israelis, portraying himself as someone who will stand up against crime, terrorism, and the perceived failure of previous governments to ensure safety. This messaging has helped him gain support from voters beyond the traditional far-right base, including disillusioned centrists and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jewish communities who feel neglected by the political establishment.

Despite this attempt at moderation, Ben-Gvir's critics argue that his core ideology remains unchanged and that his softened rhetoric is merely a strategic façade. His past associations with extremist elements and his inflammatory remarks continue to raise concerns among political opponents and civil rights groups.

Accusations of Incitement and Radical Policies

Ben-Gvir has faced numerous accusations of incitement to violence and racism, both from within Israel and internationally. Critics argue that his rhetoric has emboldened far-right extremists and contributed to increased tensions between Jews and Arabs. Some key incidents that have fueled criticism include:

- **Ties to Extremist Groups:** Despite attempts to distance himself from Kahanism, Ben-Gvir has been seen at events honoring figures like Baruch Goldstein, the perpetrator of the 1994 Hebron massacre. Although he later

removed a picture of Goldstein from his home, critics see his past admiration as indicative of his true beliefs.

- **Incendiary Statements:** He has repeatedly made inflammatory remarks about Arab citizens, once stating that Arab members of the Knesset were "enemies" who should be expelled from the country.
- **Provocative Actions:** His visits to volatile sites, such as the Temple Mount, have been criticized as deliberate provocations that increase the risk of conflict with Palestinians.

Internationally, Ben-Gvir has been widely condemned by human rights organizations, the European Union, and segments of the U.S. government. His presence in the Israeli cabinet has been described as a troubling sign of the growing influence of extremist elements within Israel's government.

Conclusion

Itamar Ben-Gvir's transformation from a radical Kahanist activist to a prominent government minister is a striking example of the normalization of far-right ideologies within Israeli politics. His ability to balance extremist policies with a more polished public image has allowed him to appeal to a wider segment of the electorate, giving him significant political influence.

However, his policies and rhetoric continue to provoke deep divisions within Israeli society and fuel tensions with Palestinians and the international community. Whether his tenure in government will lead to the implementation of long-term far-right policies or merely serve as a temporary political phase remains to be seen. What is clear is that Ben-Gvir's rise signals a profound shift in Israeli politics, where once-fringe ideas are now shaping the national agenda.

VII. The Impact of Kahanism on Israeli Society and Politics

The Normalization of Extremist Views

The rise of Kahanist-inspired rhetoric and policies in Israeli politics has led to a gradual normalization of extremist views that were once considered fringe. Over

the past few decades, figures such as Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir have introduced elements of Kahanism into mainstream political discourse, shaping public attitudes and policy decisions in ways that reflect Rabbi Meir Kahane's vision of a Jewish supremacist state.

How Kahanist Rhetoric Influences Public Discourse

Kahanist rhetoric, which emphasizes Jewish sovereignty over the entire biblical Land of Israel and views Arabs as an existential threat, has infiltrated public discourse through political speeches, social media, and educational institutions. This rhetoric frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in absolute terms, portraying it as a zero-sum game in which Jewish survival necessitates Palestinian displacement or subjugation. As a result:

- **Shift in Political Language:** Political figures who once distanced themselves from Kahanist ideology now increasingly adopt hardline stances, using terms such as "enemy within" and "demographic threat" when referring to Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank.
- **Legitimization of Discriminatory Policies:** Proposals that were once unthinkable, such as the mass deportation of Arabs or restricting their political participation, are now openly discussed in political platforms and media outlets.
- **Impact on Youth and Education:** Kahanist ideals have gained traction among younger generations, particularly in religious-nationalist schools, where narratives emphasizing Jewish exclusivity and territorial expansion are promoted.
- **Social Polarization:** The increasing acceptance of Kahanist rhetoric has deepened divisions within Israeli society, polarizing communities along ethnic and ideological lines and marginalizing voices advocating for coexistence and peace.

The media's portrayal of Kahanist-aligned figures has also played a significant role in mainstreaming extremist views. Figures such as Itamar Ben-Gvir, who were once relegated to the political periphery, now enjoy significant media coverage, allowing them to present their ideas to a broader audience under the guise of "law and order" or "national security."

Impact on Palestinian-Israeli Relations

The influence of Kahanist ideology on Israeli policies has had profound consequences for Palestinian-Israeli relations, exacerbating tensions and fueling cycles of violence. The adoption of aggressive settlement policies, discriminatory legislation, and inflammatory rhetoric has significantly diminished the prospects for peaceful coexistence and further entrenched the conflict.

Heightened Tensions and Violence in the West Bank and Beyond

One of the most tangible impacts of Kahanist-inspired policies is the escalation of violence in the West Bank, where settler militancy, military operations, and Palestinian resistance have all intensified in recent years. Several factors contribute to this escalation:

1. **Settlement Expansion:**
    - The rapid expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, encouraged by Kahanist-aligned politicians, has led to increased friction with Palestinian communities. Settler violence, often tacitly supported by far-right politicians, has resulted in frequent clashes, forced evictions, and destruction of Palestinian property.
    - Palestinian militants, in response, have carried out attacks on settlers and Israeli security forces, further escalating tensions.
2. **Legislative Discrimination:**
    - Policies such as land appropriation laws, restricted movement regulations, and the denial of building permits to Palestinians have deepened resentment and economic hardship in Palestinian communities.
    - The promotion of laws that prioritize Jewish national identity over democratic values has alienated Palestinian citizens of Israel, leading to increased protests and civil unrest within Israel's borders.
3. **Provocations at Religious Sites:**
    - Kahanist figures, particularly Itamar Ben-Gvir, have repeatedly visited the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound, a site of immense religious

significance to both Jews and Muslims. These visits, perceived by Palestinians as provocations, have sparked waves of violence in Jerusalem and beyond.

4. **Security Crackdowns:**
    - In response to heightened tensions, the Israeli security establishment has implemented stricter measures, such as mass arrests, administrative detentions, and military raids on Palestinian towns and refugee camps. While intended to curb violence, these actions often exacerbate resentment and lead to further confrontations.

Overall, the infusion of Kahanist ideology into state policy has reinforced a cycle of oppression, resistance, and retaliation, making the prospect of a negotiated peace increasingly elusive. Palestinians have grown more distrustful of the Israeli government, viewing it as dominated by extremist elements unwilling to consider their national aspirations.

International Reactions and Diplomatic Challenges

As Kahanist-inspired policies and rhetoric have gained prominence within Israeli politics, the international community has responded with increasing concern. Israel's alignment with far-right elements has strained its diplomatic relations with key allies and heightened tensions with the broader Arab world.

Responses from the U.S., EU, and Arab Nations

1. **United States:**
    - The U.S., Israel’s most critical ally, has expressed growing unease over the influence of far-right figures like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir in Netanyahu’s coalition government.
    - The Biden administration has warned against policies that could undermine the two-state solution and has expressed concern over actions such as settlement expansion and violence against Palestinians.

- However, political dynamics within the U.S., particularly among evangelical Christian supporters of Israel, have prevented any significant punitive actions, such as reductions in military aid or sanctions.

2. **European Union:**
    - The EU has been more vocal in its criticism of Kahanist-influenced policies, condemning actions such as settlement expansion, house demolitions, and human rights violations in the West Bank.
    - Several European governments have threatened economic consequences, such as restrictions on trade with Israeli settlements, and have increased support for Palestinian civil society organizations as a countermeasure.
3. **Arab Nations:**
    - Despite the normalization agreements under the Abraham Accords, Arab nations such as the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco have found themselves in a delicate position, balancing economic and strategic interests with public discontent over Israel's rightward shift.
    - Countries with historical peace agreements, such as Egypt and Jordan, have warned that provocative actions in Jerusalem could destabilize regional peace and lead to widespread unrest.
    - The broader Arab world, particularly countries without formal ties to Israel, continues to see Kahanist-influenced policies as a reinforcement of longstanding grievances regarding Israeli occupation and expansionism.
4. **United Nations and Human Rights Organizations:**
    - The UN has repeatedly condemned Israeli policies linked to Kahanist ideology, citing violations of international law and human rights standards.

- Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have classified Israel's actions in the occupied territories as forms of apartheid, a charge that Israeli officials strongly reject.

Diplomatic Challenges for Israel

The increasing influence of Kahanist ideology has created several diplomatic challenges for Israel:

- **Erosion of Israel's Democratic Image:** The international perception of Israel as a liberal democracy is being undermined by policies that prioritize ethnic nationalism over equal rights.
- **Strained Relations with Western Allies:** Governments in Europe and North America are facing pressure from human rights groups and pro-Palestinian activists to take stronger action against Israel.
- **Challenges to Normalization Efforts:** Efforts to expand the Abraham Accords and build ties with more Arab nations are being complicated by policies seen as provocative and expansionist.

Despite these challenges, Israel's diplomatic efforts continue to rely on strong security and economic partnerships, with many governments choosing to prioritize strategic cooperation over political concerns.

Conclusion

The growing influence of Kahanism in Israeli society and politics has had profound domestic and international consequences. As extremist views become more normalized, they not only exacerbate tensions with Palestinians but also pose serious diplomatic challenges for Israel on the global stage. Moving forward, Israel will need to navigate these internal and external pressures carefully, balancing nationalist ambitions with the realities of maintaining international alliances and regional stability.

VIII. Countermovements and Resistance

The rise of Kahanist-inspired ideology in Israeli politics has not gone unchallenged. A variety of political, social, and religious movements have emerged in response, seeking to counteract the normalization of extremist views and advocate for a more inclusive and democratic vision of Israel. These counterforces come from the political left and center, civil society organizations, and segments of religious and secular communities that oppose the vision of an ethnocentric and theocratic Jewish state.

Opposition from the Israeli Left and Center

Political and Civil Society Responses to the Rise of Extremism

The Israeli political left and center have been vocal in their opposition to the mainstreaming of Kahanist ideas, advocating for a pluralistic and democratic Israel that respects the rights of all its citizens, including Arab Israelis. Their opposition has taken multiple forms, including political campaigns, legal challenges, and grassroots activism aimed at promoting coexistence and countering discriminatory policies.

1. **Political Opposition:**
    - Left-wing parties such as Meretz and factions within the Labor Party have consistently denounced the influence of far-right, Kahanist-aligned politicians such as Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir. They advocate for the protection of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and policies that uphold minority rights.
    - Centrist parties, including Yesh Atid, led by former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, have positioned themselves as defenders of Israel's democratic character, warning that the rise of ultra-nationalist elements threatens the country's international standing and internal cohesion.
    - Arab-majority parties, such as the Joint List and Ra'am, have also played a key role in resisting Kahanist policies, advocating for Arab rights and greater political participation.

2. **Civil Society and Legal Advocacy:**
    - Organizations such as B'Tselem, Adalah, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) work to document and challenge human rights abuses stemming from extremist policies, particularly in the West Bank and Arab communities within Israel.
    - Legal organizations frequently petition Israel's Supreme Court to challenge discriminatory legislation and policies that marginalize Arab citizens and restrict civil liberties.
    - Protests and demonstrations have become regular occurrences, with movements such as Standing Together, a grassroots Jewish-Arab coalition, advocating for coexistence and equality.
3. **Youth and Educational Initiatives:**
    - Efforts have been made to counter radicalization among Israeli youth through educational programs promoting democratic values and historical awareness. Groups like Peace Now organize outreach programs aimed at fostering dialogue between Jewish and Arab communities.
    - Some universities and educational institutions have taken steps to introduce curricula that emphasize pluralism and human rights in response to the rise of extremist ideologies among younger generations.

Despite these efforts, the influence of the far-right remains strong, fueled by fears of terrorism, demographic concerns, and political polarization. Nonetheless, the Israeli left and center continue to serve as an important counterweight to the rise of Kahanist-inspired policies.

Religious and Secular Divides

The Role of Different Jewish Communities in Countering Kahanist Influence

The opposition to Kahanism is not limited to secular and liberal groups; significant resistance also exists within Israel's religious communities. The divide between

secular and religious Jewish communities often shapes responses to the rise of extremism, with different factions advocating varying approaches to governance, civil rights, and the role of religion in the state.

1. **Moderate Religious Zionists:**
    - While Kahanist ideology has found a home within the radical fringes of the Religious Zionist movement, many within this community oppose extremism and advocate for a more inclusive interpretation of Jewish nationalism.
    - Religious leaders such as Rabbi Benny Lau and organizations like Tzohar, which promote a moderate approach to Jewish identity, argue that Israel should remain both Jewish and democratic, offering a counterbalance to the theocratic aspirations of Kahanist-aligned factions.
    - Some settler leaders have also distanced themselves from the rhetoric of figures like Ben-Gvir, arguing for peaceful coexistence with Palestinians rather than forced displacement.
2. **Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Opposition:**
    - The Haredi community, while often aligned with right-wing policies for pragmatic reasons, generally rejects Kahanist ideology's emphasis on Jewish supremacy and territorial expansion, focusing instead on religious observance and community welfare.
    - Prominent Haredi rabbis have spoken out against violent settler actions and policies that they view as provoking unnecessary conflict and undermining Israel's moral fabric.
3. **Secular Resistance:**
    - Secular Israelis, particularly in urban centers such as Tel Aviv and Haifa, have been among the most vocal opponents of Kahanist influence. They view the push for a theocratic state as a direct threat to Israel's democratic identity and personal freedoms.

- Many secular organizations advocate for a separation of religion and state, pushing back against legislative attempts to impose religious law on public life and civil rights.

The divide between secular and religious Israelis remains a fundamental tension in Israeli society, with each group offering differing visions for the country's future. While some religious factions seek to resist Kahanist extremism from within, secular groups continue to challenge its political legitimacy on democratic grounds.

Potential Paths Forward

As Israel grapples with the growing influence of Kahanist-inspired policies, various pathways have been proposed to balance security concerns with democratic values. A key challenge lies in ensuring the security of Israeli citizens while maintaining a commitment to human rights and civil liberties.

Balancing Security Concerns with Democratic Values

1. **Strengthening Democratic Institutions:**
    - One of the most effective ways to counter extremist influence is by reinforcing the strength of democratic institutions such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society organizations.
    - Legislative efforts to prevent the concentration of power and protect minority rights are crucial to maintaining a functioning democracy.
2. **Dialogue and Reconciliation Efforts:**
    - Encouraging intercommunal dialogue between Jewish and Arab citizens can help to counteract the polarization fostered by extremist rhetoric.
    - Programs aimed at economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and shared civil initiatives can foster greater understanding and reduce tensions.

3. **Security Policy Reforms:**
    - A balanced security policy that addresses legitimate threats while upholding ethical standards is essential to countering narratives that justify oppression and violence.
    - Security operations should be conducted in a way that minimizes harm to civilians and adheres to international human rights standards.
4. **International Engagement:**
    - Cooperation with international partners, including the U.S. and European allies, can help Israel navigate its security challenges while maintaining its commitment to democratic principles.
    - Foreign pressure and incentives could encourage policies that balance security with human rights, ensuring that Israel remains a respected member of the international community.
5. **Educational Reform:**
    - Addressing extremist narratives at their root requires comprehensive educational reforms that promote critical thinking, historical awareness, and the values of democracy and pluralism.
    - Expanding education about the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can provide younger generations with the tools to resist extremist ideology.
6. **Electoral Strategies:**
    - The formation of broad political coalitions aimed at countering far-right influence in government could provide a viable alternative for voters concerned about Israel's democratic future.
    - Engaging disenfranchised voters and encouraging greater Arab participation in elections could also help shift the political balance.

Conclusion

The rise of Kahanist ideology presents significant challenges to Israeli society, but a diverse and determined opposition remains committed to preserving Israel's democratic and pluralistic character. Through political action, civil society initiatives, and intercommunal dialogue, there is hope that Israel can navigate these tensions and forge a path forward that ensures both security and democratic values. The battle against extremism will require resilience, unity, and a commitment to justice and equality for all of Israel's citizens.

IX. Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The trajectory of Kahanism in Israel has undergone a remarkable transformation from a radical fringe ideology to a significant political force that influences mainstream discourse and policy. Originating with Rabbi Meir Kahane in the 1970s, Kahanism was initially dismissed by the Israeli political establishment due to its extreme views advocating Jewish supremacy, the expulsion of Arabs, and the establishment of a theocratic state governed by Jewish law. However, despite being banned from electoral politics in the late 1980s, Kahanist ideology continued to thrive in underground settler movements and far-right circles.

Over the past few decades, key figures such as Benjamin Netanyahu, Bezalel Smotrich, and Itamar Ben-Gvir have played instrumental roles in bringing elements of Kahanist ideology into the mainstream. Netanyahu, through strategic political alliances, has facilitated the rise of far-right factions that share Kahanist views, while Smotrich and Ben-Gvir have openly advocated for policies that echo Kahane’s vision of a Jewish-only state. Their influence has been most evident in policies related to settlement expansion, security crackdowns, and legislative efforts to prioritize Jewish identity over democratic inclusivity.

The mainstreaming of Kahanism has had profound consequences on Israeli society and its political landscape, including:

1. **Erosion of Democratic Norms:** The increasing acceptance of ethnic nationalism has led to laws and policies that prioritize Jewish supremacy, challenging Israel's commitment to being both Jewish and democratic.
2. **Polarization of Society:** The spread of Kahanist rhetoric has deepened divisions within Israeli society, exacerbating tensions between Jewish and Arab communities, as well as between religious and secular citizens.
3. **Impact on Palestinian Relations:** Policies inspired by Kahanist thought have further marginalized Palestinians, fueling cycles of violence and diminishing the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
4. **International Scrutiny:** Israel's turn toward far-right politics has strained relationships with key allies, drawing criticism from Western democracies while emboldening opposition from regional adversaries.

Despite these developments, a strong counter-movement has emerged, composed of left-wing and centrist political forces, civil society organizations, and moderate religious groups, all striving to uphold democratic values and counter the influence of extremist ideologies.

The Future of Kahanist Ideology in Israel

The future trajectory of Kahanism in Israel hinges on several key factors, including the resilience of democratic institutions, the shifting political landscape, and public sentiment regarding security and identity.

1. **Potential for Continued Growth:**
    - Kahanist ideology may continue to gain traction, especially if security concerns and demographic anxieties remain prominent in Israeli politics.
    - If right-wing coalitions continue to dominate the political scene, figures such as Ben-Gvir and Smotrich could further embed Kahanist principles into law and governance.

- The expansion of Jewish settlements and confrontations with Palestinians may reinforce the appeal of Kahanist rhetoric, portraying it as the only viable solution to perceived threats.

2. **Challenges to Kahanism's Growth:**
    - Opposition from within Israel, including legal challenges, media scrutiny, and political mobilization by moderate factions, could curb Kahanism’s influence.
    - Economic and diplomatic pressures from the international community may force Israel to moderate its stance and distance itself from openly extremist policies.
    - Generational shifts may bring new priorities to the forefront, potentially steering Israeli politics toward greater inclusivity and pragmatism rather than ideological rigidity.
3. **The Role of the Israeli Judiciary:**
    - Israel’s judicial system has historically acted as a check on extremist policies. If the judiciary maintains its independence, it could serve as a bulwark against the institutionalization of Kahanist ideals.
    - However, if judicial reforms pushed by right-wing factions succeed in limiting the judiciary’s power, the path could be cleared for further entrenchment of Kahanist policies.

Ultimately, whether Kahanism continues to grow or is curbed by opposition forces will depend on how Israeli society balances its identity as a Jewish state with the principles of democracy and human rights.

Final Reflections

The rise of Kahanism poses profound questions for the future of Israel and its core identity as both a Jewish and democratic state. The delicate balance between nationalism, security, and democracy remains at the heart of this issue.

1. **Nationalism vs. Inclusivity:**
    - The push for an ethnically homogeneous Jewish state, as advocated by Kahanist-inspired politicians, stands in stark contrast to the vision of Israel as a pluralistic democracy that respects the rights of all its citizens.
    - Balancing Jewish national aspirations with the need to ensure equal rights for non-Jewish citizens is crucial for Israel's social cohesion and long-term stability.
2. **Security vs. Civil Liberties:**
    - While Israel faces genuine security threats, the challenge lies in addressing them without eroding democratic freedoms or engaging in discriminatory policies that alienate significant portions of the population.
    - Striking a balance between maintaining security and upholding civil liberties is essential for preserving Israel's democratic character.
3. **Domestic vs. International Standing:**
    - The normalization of far-right policies risks further isolating Israel on the global stage and jeopardizing relationships with allies who prioritize democratic values and human rights.
    - Israel must navigate the complexities of maintaining its strategic alliances while addressing internal pressures from its growing nationalist movements.

Looking ahead, Israel's leaders and citizens must confront the difficult reality that the choices they make today will shape the country's future. Whether they opt for inclusivity and democracy or nationalism and exclusion will determine Israel's standing as a state that can balance its Jewish identity with its democratic commitments.

In conclusion, Kahanism's rise serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of extremism in democratic societies. It underscores the importance of vigilance in protecting democratic institutions and ensuring that the values of pluralism and

coexistence remain at the core of Israel's national identity. As the debate over the country's future continues, it remains to be seen whether Israel will find a way to harmonize its competing ideals or succumb to the forces of division and exclusion.

X. References

A comprehensive examination of Kahanism and its influence on Israeli politics requires a thorough review of academic sources, books, articles, and official government records. These references provide historical context, analysis of key figures, and insight into the evolution of extremist ideologies within Israel's political landscape. Below is an expanded overview of potential sources categorized by type and relevance.

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1. Academic Sources

Scholarly research on Kahanism, religious nationalism, and Israeli political trends provides a deep understanding of the movement's origins, evolution, and contemporary influence. The following academic sources offer critical perspectives on the topic:

- **Books:**
    - Sprinzak, Ehud. *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination.* New York: Free Press, 1999.
        - Provides an in-depth analysis of Israeli political extremism, with a detailed focus on the rise and influence of Kahanism within the broader right-wing movement.
    - Ravitzky, Aviezer. *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
        - Examines the theological underpinnings of Jewish radical movements, including Kahanism and its impact on Israeli society.
    - Pedahzur, Ami. *The Israeli Radical Right: Politics and Culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
        - A detailed study of far-right movements in Israel, their ideological roots, and their penetration into mainstream politics.

    - Kahane, Meir. *They Must Go.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1981.
        - Kahane's own writings outlining his vision for a Jewish-only state and his justification for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel.

- **Journal Articles:**
    - Lustick, Ian. "Israel's Dangerous Fundamentalists." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 4, 1987, pp. 92-109.
        - Discusses the threats posed by Kahanist ideology and religious extremism to Israeli democracy and regional stability.
    - Sprinzak, Ehud. "The Emergence of the Israeli Radical Right." *Comparative Politics*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1989, pp. 171-192.
        - Analyzes the socio-political factors contributing to the rise of radical right-wing groups, including Kach and Otzma Yehudit.
    - Pedahzur, Ami, and Perliger, Arie. "Jewish Terrorism in Israel: Patterns and Trends." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2006, pp. 439-458.
        - Examines acts of violence committed by Kahanist adherents and their ideological motivations.
- **Theses and Dissertations:**
    - Studies conducted at Israeli and international universities analyzing the impact of Kahanism on Israeli political discourse and security policies.

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2. Books and Articles on Israeli Politics

To contextualize Kahanism within the broader landscape of Israeli politics, the following books and articles offer valuable insights:

- Shindler, Colin. *A History of Modern Israel: From the Birth of the State to the Present Day.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

    - Covers the political evolution of Israel, including the impact of extremist ideologies on governance and society.
- Klein, Menachem. *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
    - Provides historical analysis of Jewish-Arab relations and the divisive impact of right-wing nationalism.
- Goldberg, Jeffrey. "Price Tag: Extremist Settlers and the Battle for Israel's Soul." *The New Yorker*, November 2013.
    - Investigates the radical settler movement's ideology and its link to Kahanist thought.
- Kershner, Isabel. *Land of Hope and Fear: Israel's Battle for Its Inner Soul.* New York: Knopf, 2021.
    - Explores the deepening divisions within Israeli society, including the rise of ultra-nationalist figures.

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3. Official Statements and Legislative Records

Official government statements and legislative actions offer direct evidence of the influence of Kahanist ideology on policy-making and political discourse in Israel. Key documents include:

- **Israeli Knesset Records:**
    - Transcripts of Knesset debates regarding the banning of the Kach party (1988) and subsequent legislative efforts to prevent extremist parties from participating in elections.
    - Laws such as the **Nation-State Law (2018)** that reinforce Jewish national identity, perceived by critics as aligning with Kahanist principles.

- **Supreme Court Rulings:**
    - Decisions on cases involving Kahanist individuals and organizations, including rulings that banned the Kach party and Kahane Chai due to their racist platforms.
    - Court decisions regarding the legality of settlement expansion policies linked to Kahanist-aligned politicians.
- **Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Statements:**
    - Official military policies regarding settler violence and interactions with Palestinian communities in the West Bank.
    - Statements responding to provocations and incidents involving Kahanist-influenced groups.
- **Reports from the Ministry of Public Security:**
    - Documentation on policies related to internal security, particularly under the leadership of Itamar Ben-Gvir.
- **International Responses:**
    - Statements from the United Nations, European Union, and U.S. Department of State addressing concerns over extremist policies and their impact on peace efforts.
    - U.S. Congressional hearings and reports discussing Kahanist influence in Israeli politics and its implications for U.S.-Israel relations.

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4. Reports from Human Rights Organizations

Several human rights organizations have published extensive reports documenting the impact of Kahanist policies on Palestinian communities and Israeli democracy:

- **B’Tselem:**
    - Reports on settler violence, discriminatory policies, and the erosion of democratic norms in Israel.

- **Human Rights Watch:**
    - Annual reports detailing instances of racial discrimination and the impact of Kahanist-influenced policies on Palestinians.
- **Amnesty International:**
    - Analyses of Israel's legal framework in the context of international human rights standards.

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5. Media Coverage and Interviews

Media sources play a significant role in shaping public perception of Kahanism and its political implications. Notable news outlets covering Kahanist influence include:

- **Haaretz:** Regular analysis and investigative reports on far-right figures and movements in Israel.
- **The Jerusalem Post:** Coverage of nationalist policies and reactions from the Israeli political spectrum.
- **The Times of Israel:** Balanced reporting on political developments and civil society responses to extremism.
- **Al Jazeera:** Perspectives from the Palestinian side on the impact of Kahanist policies.
- **BBC and CNN:** International perspectives on Israel’s political climate and its implications for global diplomacy.

Conclusion

By consulting these sources, researchers and policymakers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the rise of Kahanism, its impact on Israeli society, and the broader geopolitical ramifications. The interplay between academic scholarship, official records, and media coverage provides a nuanced view of how extremist ideologies transition from the fringes to the political

mainstream and what countermeasures can be employed to mitigate their influence.